



AP-NORC poll: 1 in 5 in U.S. lost someone close in pandemic

By L. NEERGAARD, H. FINGER-
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Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — About 1 in 5 Americans say they lost a relative or close friend to the coronavirus, highlighting the division between heartache and hope as the country itches to get back to normal a year into the pandemic.

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research illustrates how the stage is set for a two-tiered recovery. The public's worry about the virus has dropped to its lowest point since the fall, before the holidays brought skyrocketing cases into the new year.

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House Budget Committee Chairman John Yarmuth, D-Ky., center, is flanked by Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass., left, and Majority Whip James Clyburn, D-S.C., at a news conference ahead of the vote on the Democrat's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill, at the Capitol in Washington, Tuesday, March 9, 2021.

Associated Press

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AP-NORC poll: 1 in 5 in U.S. lost someone close in pandemic



President Joe Biden signs the American Rescue Plan, a coronavirus relief package, in the Oval Office of the White House, Thursday, March 11, 2021, in Washington.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

But people still in mourning express frustration at the continued struggle to stay safe.

"We didn't have a chance to grieve. It's almost like it happened yesterday for us. It's still fresh," said Nettie Parks of Volusia County, Florida, whose only brother died of COVID-19 last April. Because of travel restrictions, Parks and her five sisters have yet to hold a memorial.

Parks, 60, said she retired from her customer service job last year in part because of worry about workplace exposure, and now she is watching with dread as more states and cities relax health rules.

Only about 3 in 10 Ameri-

cans are very worried about themselves or a family member being infected with the virus, down from about 4 in 10 in recent months. Still, a majority are at least somewhat worried. "They're letting their guard down and they shouldn't," Parks said. "People are going to have to realize this thing is not going anywhere. It's not over."

COVID-19's toll is staggering, more than 527,000 dead in the U.S. alone, and counting.

But "it's hard to conceptualize the true danger if you don't know it personally," said Dr. K. Luan Phan, psychiatry chief at Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center.

For those who lost a loved one, "that fear is most salient in them. They're going to be a lot more cautious as businesses reopen and as schools start back," Phan said.

And without that first-hand experience, even people who heeded health officials' pleas to stay masked and keep their distance are succumbing to pandemic fatigue because

"fears tend to habituate," he said.

Communities of color were hardest hit by the coronavirus. The AP-NORC poll found about 30% of African Americans, like Parks, and Hispanics know a relative or close friend who died from the virus, compared with 15% of white people.

That translates into differences in how worried people are about a virus that remains a serious threat until most of the country -- and the world -- gets vaccinated. Despite recent drops in cases, 43% of Black Americans and 39% of Hispanics are very or extremely worried about themselves or a loved one getting COVID-19, compared to just 25% of white people. (For other racial and ethnic groups, sample sizes are too small to analyze.)

While vaccines offer real hope for ending the scourge, the poll also found about 1 in 3 Americans don't intend to get their shot. The most reluctant: Younger adults, people without college degrees, and Republicans.

The hardest-hit are also

having the hardest time getting vaccinated: 16% of Black Americans and 15% of Hispanics say they already have received at least one shot, compared to 26% of white people. But majorities in each group want to get vaccinated.

Currently demand for vaccines still outstrips supply, and about 4 in 10 Americans, especially older adults, say the sign-up process has been poor.

John Perez, a retired teacher and school administrator in Los Angeles, spent hours trying to sign up online before giving up. Then a friend found a drive-thru vaccination site with openings.

"When I was driving there for the first shot, I was going through a tunnel of emotions," the 68-year-old said. "I knew what a special moment it was."

Overall, confidence in the vaccines is slowly strengthening. The poll found 25% of Americans aren't confident the shots were properly tested, down somewhat from 32% who expected they wouldn't be in December, just before the first ones were cleared.

"We were a little skeptical when it was first coming out because it was so politicized," said Bob Richard, 50, of Smithfield, Rhode Island. But now, he said his family is inclined to get the shots -- if they can sort through the appointment system when it's their turn. The poll found two-thirds of Americans say their fellow citizens nationwide haven't taken the pandemic seriously enough.

"The conflict with people who don't take it serious as I do, it's disappointing," said Wayne Denley, 73, of Alexandria, Louisiana.

Early on, he and his wife started keeping a list of people they knew who'd gotten sick. By November, they'd counted nine deaths and dozens of infections.

He'd share the sobering list with people doubtful of the pandemic's toll, yet still would see unmasked acquaintances while running errands.

"I'm glad I wrote them down -- it helped make it real for me," Denley said. "You sort of become numb to it."

There are exceptionally wide partisan differences. Most Democrats, 60%, say their local communities failed to take the threat seriously enough and even more, 83%, say the country as a whole didn't either.

Among Republicans, 31% say their localities didn't take the pandemic seriously enough, and 44% said that of the country. But another third of Republicans say the U.S. overreacted.

The differences translate into behavior: More than three-quarters of Democrats say they always wear a mask around others compared to about half of Republicans.

And the divisions have Phan, the psychiatrist, worried.

"We've survived something that we should be grateful for having survived it. How do we repay or reciprocate that good fortune? The only way to do it is to be stronger in the year after the epidemic than before," he said. □



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Resignation demands grow as police get Cuomo groping report

By MARINA VILLENEUVE

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's grip on power appeared increasingly threatened Thursday as a majority of state legislators called for his resignation and police in the state capitol said they stood ready to investigate a groping allegation. The Times Union of Albany reported Wednesday that an unidentified aide had claimed Cuomo reached under her shirt and fondled her after summoning her to his official residence late last year. Cuomo said he never touched anyone inappropriately.

A lawyer for the governor said Thursday that she reported the allegation to police after the woman involved declined to do so herself.

Beth Garvey, the governor's acting counsel, said in a statement that as a matter of state policy, the woman who made the allegations was told she should contact her local police department.

"In this case the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police department and gave them the attorney's information," Garvey said.

She said the state was obligated to do so under state law.

An Albany Police Department spokesperson, Steve



New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo speaks at a vaccination site on Monday, March 8, 2021, in New York.

Associated Press

Smith, didn't immediately return a message from The Associated Press seeking comment, but he told The New York Times police had reached out to a representative for the woman and offered their services. The possible involvement of police comes as more lawmakers called on him to resign over alleged misconduct with women.

At least 121 members of the state Assembly and Senate have said publicly they believe Cuomo can no longer govern and should quit office now, according to a tally by The Associated Press. The count includes 65 Democrats and 56 Republicans.

Cuomo's support in the

state Senate was especially thin. Roughly two thirds of its members have called for the Democrat's resignation, including Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins.

The top Democrat in the state Assembly, Speaker Carl Heastie, said he was caucusing with members Thursday to discuss "potential paths forward" in light of mounting allegations.

In New York, the Assembly is the legislative house that could move to impeach Cuomo, who has faced multiple allegations that he made the workplace an uncomfortable place for young women with sexually suggestive remarks and behavior, including unwanted

touching and a kiss.

A group of 59 Democratic state legislators, including 19 senators and 40 Assembly members said in a letter Thursday that it was time for Cuomo to go.

"In light of the Governor's admission of inappropriate behavior and the findings of altered data on nursing home COVID-19 deaths he has lost the confidence of the public and the state legislature, rendering him ineffective in this time of most urgent need," the letter said. "It is time for Governor Cuomo to resign."

Cuomo has repeatedly said he won't resign and urged the public to await the outcome of an investigation of his conduct by

state Attorney General Letitia James. Cuomo's office didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday.

While Cuomo has denied inappropriately touching anyone, he has apologized for comments he made to women staffers. He has said he was engaging in what he thought was playful banter and didn't realize it was making people uncomfortable.

In the newest allegation against Cuomo, the Times Union of Albany reported that the governor had summoned the aide to his Albany mansion, saying he needed help with his cellphone. After she arrived, Cuomo closed the door, reached under her shirt and fondled her, the newspaper reported.

The newspaper's reporting was based on an unidentified source with knowledge of the woman's accusation, who said she first told the story to someone on Cuomo's staff in recent days. The newspaper hadn't spoken to the woman and didn't identify her.

"I have never done anything like this," Cuomo said through a spokesperson Wednesday evening.

"The details of this report are gut-wrenching," Cuomo said, adding that he would not speak to the specifics of this or any other allegation, given an ongoing investigation overseen by the state attorney general. □

Michelle Obama hooked on knitting, thinking about retirement

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Michelle Obama is knitting and thinking about retiring from public life. The former first lady says in a new People magazine interview that she picked up knitting needles to pass time during the coronavirus pandemic. And now she's hooked. "Knitting is a forever proposition," she said. "You don't master knitting, because once

you make a scarf, there's the blanket. And once you do the blanket, you've got to do the hat, the socks." She's working on her first crewneck sweater for her husband, former President Barack Obama. "I'm figuring out how to make sleeves and a collar," she said. "I could go on about knitting!" The former first lady also talks about how the pandemic helped her and her husband reclaim

"stolen moments" with Malia, 22, and Sasha, 19, who both returned home from college to quarantine with their parents at the family homes in Washington and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Mrs. Obama also discusses what she says is the "low-grade depression" she experienced during the pandemic lockdowns and after George Floyd's killing by Minneapolis police last May,



In this May 11, 2019, file photo, former first lady Michelle Obama speaks during an appearance in Atlanta.

Associated Press

along with her shift away from high-impact exercise and what she wants out of retirement. □

Judge OKs 3rd-degree murder charge for ex-cop in Floyd death

By **STEVE KARNOWSKI and AMY FORLITI**

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A judge on Thursday granted prosecutors' request to add a third-degree murder count against a former Minneapolis police officer charged in George Floyd's death, offering jurors an additional option for conviction and resolving an issue that might have delayed his trial for months. Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill reinstated the charge after the former officer, Derek Chauvin, failed to get appellate courts to block it. Cahill had earlier rejected the charge as not warranted by the circumstances of Floyd's death, but an appellate court ruling in an unrelated case established new grounds.

Chauvin already faced second-degree murder and manslaughter charges. Legal experts say the additional charge helps prosecutors by giving jurors another option to find Chauvin guilty of murder. Cahill told potential jurors after the ruling that he still expects opening statements on March 29.

The dispute over the third-degree murder charge revolved around wording in the law that references an act "eminently dangerous to others." Cahill's initial decision to dismiss the charge noted that Chauvin's conduct might be construed as not dangerous to anyone but Floyd.



In this image taken from video, defense attorney Eric Nelson, left, and defendant former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin listen as Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill presides over jury selection, Wednesday, March 10, 2021, at the Hennepin County Courthouse in Minneapolis, Minn., in the trial of Chauvin, who is accused in the May 25, 2020, death of George Floyd.

Associated Press

But prosecutors sought to revive the charge after the state's Court of Appeals recently upheld the third-degree murder conviction of another former Minneapolis police officer in the 2017 killing of an Australian woman. They argued that the ruling established precedent that the charge could be brought even in a case where only a single person is endangered. Arguments over when the precedent from former officer Mohamed Noor's case took effect went swiftly to the state's Supreme Court, which on Wednesday said it would not consider Chauvin's appeal. Cahill said Thursday that he accepts that precedent has been clearly established.

"I feel bound by that and I feel it would be an abuse of discretion not to grant the motion," he said.

Floyd was declared dead on May 25 after Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee against the Black man's neck for about nine minutes. Floyd's death sparked sometimes violent protests in Minneapolis and beyond, leading to a nationwide reckoning on race.

Jury selection resumed Thursday for the third day as attorneys grappled further with the challenges of seating an impartial and diverse jury in such a high-profile case. The jury by mid-afternoon Thursday included five men and one woman. Cahill said three

are white, one is multiracial, one is Hispanic and one is Black. The sole juror picked Thursday morning described himself as an outgoing, family-oriented soccer fan, for whom the prospect of the trial was "kind of exciting."

The man, who said his favorite team is the Spanish powerhouse Real Madrid, said he's also a fan of true crime podcasts and TV shows. He acknowledged under questioning from defense attorney Eric Nelson that he had a "very negative" impression of Chauvin. The man wrote on his questionnaire that he had seen the widely viewed bystander video of Floyd "desperately screaming that he couldn't breathe" even as

other officers stood by and bystanders shouted that Chauvin was killing Floyd.

Yet asked whether he could set his opinions aside and stick to the evidence presented in court, he replied: "I'm willing to see all the evidence and everything, hear witnesses."

Several other candidates were dismissed, including a woman who said she "can't unsee the video" of Chauvin pinning Floyd, and a man who said he has doubts about Black Lives Matter and the way the group pursues its goals.

Nelson pressed the woman hard on her ability to be fair despite her strong opinions. Asked how the events of last summer had affected the community, she replied: "Negatively affected because a life was taken. Positively because a movement has come from it and the whole world knows." Asked about the property damage during the unrest, she said, "I felt that was what needed to happen to bring this to the world's attention."

"Looking in your heart and looking in your mind can you assure us you can set all of that aside, all of that, and focus only on the evidence that is presented in this courtroom?" Nelson asked. "I can assure you, but like you mentioned earlier, the video is going to be a big part of the evidence and there's no changing my mind about that," she replied. □

Judge: CDC exceeded authority in issuing eviction moratorium

CLEVELAND (AP) — A federal judge in Ohio has ruled that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lacked the authority to issue a nationwide moratorium on rental evictions, the second such ruling issued by a federal judge in two weeks.

U.S. District Judge J. Philip Calabrese, sitting in Cleveland, ruled Wednesday that the CDC went beyond what the federal Public Health Service Act allows it to do in ordering a halt to evictions. However, he did not grant an injunction that would have stopped the agency from enforcing the moratorium.

The ruling comes two weeks after U.S. District Judge J. Campbell Barker in the Eastern District of Texas determined that the moratorium was unconstitutional. The Justice Department is appealing that order.

The National Association of Homebuilders and a group of property owners from across northern Ohio had filed a federal lawsuit last October, claiming the CDC's order was overreaching and arbitrary. The chair of the NAHB said the group was pleased with the judge's ruling. "Saddling landlords with the responsibility to provide free rent during this pandemic ignores their financial obligations and ability to provide safe, decent and affordable housing," Chuck Fowke said in a statement. "Even during emergencies, federal agencies must abide by the law."

The suit was one of several filed in federal courts across the country by property owners who have struggled financially because of the coronavirus. Other courts around the country have upheld the eviction ban, said Diane Yentel,

president of the National Low-Income Housing Coalition. She added that challenges to the moratorium made little sense when tens of billions of dollars in federal rental assistance are coming in the recently passed coronavirus relief bill.

"These attempts to overturn the moratorium are frivolous," Yentel said. "These landlords that are bringing these suits and working so hard to overturn the eviction moratorium will be made whole by the unprecedented amount of resources that Congress has made available. But it is going to take time to get the money into their hands."

The CDC eviction moratorium was signed in September by President Donald Trump and extended by President Joe Biden through March 31. □

Chinese lawmakers endorse tighter control over Hong Kong

By JOE McDONALD and KEN MORITSUGU

Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's ceremonial legislature on Thursday endorsed the ruling Communist Party's move to tighten control over Hong Kong by reducing the role of its public in picking the territory's leaders.

The measure adds to a crackdown against a protest movement in Hong Kong calling for greater democracy. The crackdown has prompted accusations Beijing is eroding the autonomy it promised when the former British colony was returned to China in 1997 and is hurting its status as a global financial center.

Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong has added to irritants in relations with Washington, Europe and other governments that also include trade, technology and the party's treatment of ethnic minorities. The National People's Congress voted 2,895-0, with one abstention, in support of the plan to give a pro-Beijing committee power to appoint more of Hong Kong's lawmakers, reducing the number elected by the public. NPC members, who are appointed by the party, routinely endorse party plans by unanimous vote or overwhelming majorities.



Chinese President Xi Jinping, left, and Premier Li Keqiang talk after the closing session of the National People's Congress (NPC), at the Great Hall of the People, in Beijing, Thursday, March 11, 2021.

President Xi Jinping and other leaders sat on stage in front of delegates as they cast votes electronically in the cavernous Great Hall of the People. The NPC has no real powers but the party uses its annual meeting, the year's highest-profile political event, to showcase government plans and major decisions.

The NPC also endorsed the ruling party's latest five-year development blueprint, which calls for stepping up efforts to transform China into a more self-reliant technology creator.

That threatens to worsen strains with Washington and Europe over trade and market access.

The NPC focuses on domestic issues but increasingly is overshadowed by geopolitics as Xi's government pursues more assertive trade and strategic policies and feuds with Washington, Australia and others over the coronavirus, conflicting claims to the South China Sea and accusations of spying and technology theft.

Also Thursday, the country's No. 2 leader, Premier

Li Keqiang, said economic growth might be faster than this year's official target of "above 6%" he announced last week, which surprised forecasters who expect an expansion of at least 8%. But he said Beijing is more concerned about firming up its recovery from the coronavirus and keeping growth steady.

China was the only major economy to grow last year while the United States, Europe and Japan struggled with renewed coronavirus outbreaks. Chinese growth accelerated to 6.5% over

a year earlier in the final quarter of 2020.

"There may be even faster growth," Li said at a news conference. However, he said, "we must avert wild swings in economic performance."

As an anti-virus measure, the premier sat in the Great Hall and talked by video link with reporters at a media center 6.5 kilometers (4 miles) away. Reporters were required to arrive nine hours in advance to be tested for the coronavirus and wait in hotel rooms for the results.

Under the changes in Hong Kong, a 1,500-member Election Committee will pick the territory's chief executive and an unspecified "relatively large" number of members of its 90-seat legislature.

Committee members would come from five segments of society, including business and political figures. That would give pro-Beijing forces more influence than a popular vote would. Hong Kong news reports said earlier the committee will pick one-third of the members of the Legislative Council, or LegCo.

Beijing wants to see "patriots ruling Hong Kong," the premier said. He said the changes would "safeguard national security" in the territory and support "prosperity and stability." □

Associated Press

Morocco moves toward legalizing medical marijuana

By TARIK EL BARAKAH

Associated Press

RABAT, Morocco (AP) — Morocco's government on Thursday approved a landmark bill that would legalize nonrecreational uses of marijuana. Largely motivated by growing international demand for medical and industrial cannabis, the move will set the North African kingdom — among the top global producers — on the path of creating a regulated market for an industry that has long been dominated by drug traffickers. The bill, which was ap-

proved by the Cabinet after numerous delays, will now be submitted to parliament. Some members of the powerful Islamist Justice and Development Party oppose the bill, but others support it, including the prime minister.

If it passes, Morocco would be one of the few countries in the region or in the Arab world to legalize the drug for nonrecreational use. Recreational use would remain illegal.

Morocco is seeking to establish a regulatory framework for the entire chain of cultivation, production,

processing and marketing of cannabis for medical, cosmetic and industrial uses such as textiles or paper.

The bill would also create a government agency to ensure that licit cannabis isn't being used in illegal activities.

Cannabis has been cultivated in Morocco for centuries, and in 2003 it covered an area of 134,000 hectares (more than 330,000 acres), mostly in the northern Rif region. Cultivated lands have since been reduced in size by the government



In this Sept. 14, 2014 file photo swaths of cannabis are pictured in the village of Bni Hmed in the Ketama Abdelghaya valley, northern Morocco.

Associated Press

to 47,000 hectares (about 116,000 acres) as of 2014, according to government figures. □

Taiwan bursts with creative pineapple dishes after China ban

By HUIZHONG WU

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwan's classic beef noodle soup has taken on a sweet and sour twist.

Taipei chef Hung Ching Lung created a pineapple beef noodle soup at his eponymous restaurant Chef Hung, in what he says is a modest attempt to support Taiwanese pineapple farmers.

The spiky fruit became a politically charged symbol after China banned the import of Taiwan's pineapples on March 1, citing pests. In response, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen kicked off a social media challenge called "Eat Taiwan's pineapples until you burst," calling on people to support the island's farmers.

The campaign has kicked off a pineapple media frenzy, as Taiwanese politicians sought to demonstrate their support for farmers as well as Taiwanese agriculture. Politicians from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party and the opposition Nationalist Party flocked to farms to post pictures with pineapples.



Chef Hung shows pineapple beef noodle outside of his restaurant in Taipei, Taiwan, Wednesday, March 10, 2021.

Associated Press

Restaurateurs like Hung rushed to make pineapple-infused dishes. Pineapple shrimp balls, a betel nut pineapple salad and classics like fried rice with pineapple are just some of the dishes being pushed out by restaurants and hotels on the island.

Hung said he and his team spent three days testing ways to incorporate pineapple into beef noodles. It took about 10 attempts. "The first time we tested it when we cooked it in the soup, it was very sweet, it was inedible and tasted completely of pineapple,"

he said. The successful attempt was based on separating the juice from the fruit during cooking, which removed the sweetness that would otherwise overpower the beef flavor. China denies its move to ban Taiwanese pineapples was politically motivated,

with a spokesperson for Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office saying that the decision was a "normal biosafety measure, and entirely reasonable and necessary." Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has called the move one that "flies in the face of rules-based, free and fair trade."

China has most recently leveraged its immense market in a trade war with Australia. It stopped or reduced imports of beef, coal, barley, seafood, sugar and timber from Australia after that country supported calls for a probe into the origin of the coronavirus pandemic, which is believed to have begun in China in late 2019.

Despite the hubbub, the pineapple ban may not drastically impact Taiwanese farmers.

A day after the ban was enacted, Taiwanese Premier Su Tseng-chang told local media that the amount purchased by domestic businesses and citizens exceeded the amount that would have been sold to China. □

Ethiopia's leader faces intense pressure to end Tigray war

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA

Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP)

— Ethiopia's government on Thursday faced mounting pressure to withdraw troops from the northern region of Tigray amid growing reports of war crimes in

an embattled area that now faces a humanitarian crisis.

Criticism of the conduct of government troops and their allies from neighboring Eritrea grew after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken asserted Wednesday

that "ethnic cleansing" has happened in parts of Tigray. "The challenge in Ethiopia is very significant, and it's one that we are very focused on, particularly the situation in Tigray, where we are seeing very credible reports of human rights abuses and atrocities that are ongoing," Blinken told the foreign affairs committee of the U.S. House of Representatives. Although Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed expressed concerns about the actions of the fugitive leaders of Tigray, Blinken said, "the situation in Tigray today is unacceptable and has to change, and that means a few things. It means making sure that we are getting into the region, into Tigray. Aid workers and others ... to make sure that the people are cared for, provided for

and protected." Eritrean troops as well as fighters from Amhara, an Ethiopian region bordering Tigray, "need to come out," he said, adding that the region needs "a force that will not abuse the human rights of the people of Tigray or commit acts of ethnic cleansing, which we've seen in western Tigray. That has to stop." There was no immediate comment from Ethiopian authorities. But the fugitive leaders of Tigray seized on Blinken's comments, issuing a statement on Thursday condemning what they called "the genocidal campaign" targeting their people.

"Thousands of civilians have been massacred, hundreds of thousands forcibly displaced from their homes, civilian installations and infrastructures

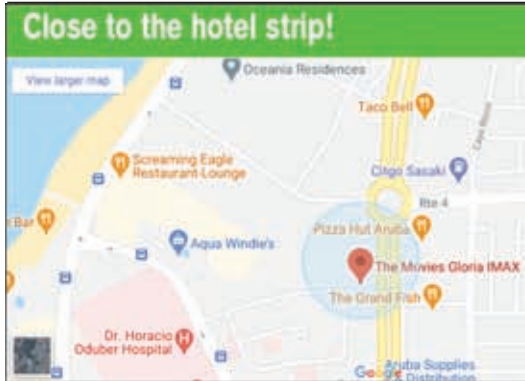
systemically destroyed," said the statement posted on Twitter by Getachew Reda, one of the fugitive leaders of Tigray. "Despite shamelessly protesting its innocence and profusely promising to allow access to humanitarian agencies and international investigation into allegations, Abiy Ahmed's regime and its partners in crime have only stepped up their war crimes and crimes against humanity in recent weeks and days."

A senior Ethiopian diplomat on Wednesday quit his post in Washington over concerns about the reported atrocities in Tigray. Berhane Kidanemariam, who served as the deputy chief of mission at the Ethiopian embassy in Washington, slammed Abiy as a reckless leader who is dividing his country. □



People displaced by the recent conflict gather around water points provided by the International Rescue Committee at a makeshift camp for the displaced in Embadanso school in Shire, in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021.

Associated Press



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Drug trafficker says he bribed Honduras president

By CLAUDIA TORRENS

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A convicted Honduran drug trafficker and former leader of a cartel testified in United States federal court Thursday that he paid now-President Juan Orlando Hernández \$250,000 for protection from arrest in 2012.

Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga, former leader of the Cachiros cartel, testified that he made the payment in cash through one of Hernández's sisters, Hilda Hernández, in exchange "for protection so that the military police and preventive police didn't capture us in Honduras."

He said he also paid so that he wouldn't be extradited to the U.S. and so companies used by the Cachiros to launder money would be favored by the government. Rivera Maradiaga has admitted to being involved in 78 murders.

At the time of the alleged bribe, Juan Orlando



In this Jan. 14, 2020, file photo, Honduras' President Juan Orlando Hernandez arrives for the swearing-in ceremony for Guatemala's new President Alejandro Giammattei at the National Theater in Guatemala City.

Hernández was leader of Honduras' Congress, but had begun angling for the presidency, which he won in 2013. He took office the following January. Hilda Hernández, who later

served in his administration, died in a helicopter crash in 2017. The accusation came in the third day of testimony in the trial of alleged drug trafficker Geovanny Fuentes Ramírez. U.S. prosecutors

have made it clear that allegations against President Hernández would arise during the trial, though he has not been charged.

Fuentes Ramírez was arrested in March 2020 in Florida.

He is charged with drug trafficking and arms possession.

Hernández has vehemently denied any connection to drug traffickers. One of his brothers, Juan Antonio Hernández, was convicted of drug trafficking in the same court in 2019.

During that trial, the president was accused of accepting more than \$1 million from Mexican drug trafficker Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán.

U.S. prosecutors have alleged that much of Hernández's political rise was funded by drug traffickers who paid to be allowed to move drugs through Honduras without interference. In January, U.S. federal prosecutors filed motions in the Fuentes Ramírez case saying that Hernández took bribes from drug traffickers and had the country's armed forces protect a cocaine laboratory and shipments to the United States. □

Associated Press

Video shows Israeli troops detaining Palestinian children

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli troops detained five Palestinian children for several hours after they were confronted by Jewish settlers while gathering wild artichokes near a settlement outpost in the occupied West Bank, an Israeli human rights group said Thursday.

B'Tselem released video of the arrest, in which heavily armed Israeli soldiers can be seen pulling the children away by force. Footage shot earlier shows the children gathering plants near the settler outpost of Havat Maon, when two

masked settlers emerge from a grove of trees.

"This is another example of the absolute disregard on the part of Israeli authorities and forces on the ground to the well-being and rights of Palestinians, no matter how young or vulnerable," B'Tselem spokesman Amit Gilutz said. "The youngest boy from yesterday's incident is 8 years old," he added. The children, whose ages range from 8 to 13, were held for around five hours, according to Gaby Lasky, a human rights lawyer who is representing them. The

two oldest, who are 12 and 13, and therefore old enough to face charges, were ordered to return next week for more questioning.

The Israeli military said "a number of suspects" were detained after they "infiltrated into a house's private property." It said they were transferred to the Israeli police, who released them to their parents.

Havat Maon is one of dozens of settler outposts established without Israeli government authorization, in addition to some 130 officially recognized settle-



This image taken from video provided by B'Tselem shows Israeli troops detaining Palestinian children near a settlement outpost in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, March 10, 2021.

Associated Press

ments. The settlements, which range from remote hilltop outposts to full-fledged towns, are home to nearly a half million Israelis. Lasky said it's "crazy" to accuse the children of trespassing in an outpost

that was built illegally. The Palestinians view all settlements as illegal and a major obstacle to their goal of bringing about an independent state including the West Bank, which Israel captured in the 1967

International Women's Day Celebration at Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino

Palm Beach – The Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino hosted a sumptuous breakfast buffet at the Morris Lapidus ballroom in honor of International Women's Day, inviting all 173 resort female Team Members to participate. Breakfast was served by an all-men crew, as a token of appreciation.

The United Nations recognized March 8th as International Women's Day for the first time in 1975, highlighting the different roles women play in their own households and in our island community.

"We feel especially fortunate here," says Director of Human Resources Glenn Farro, "of the 173 women who work at the resort we have 133 in different departments as hospitality front runners, in addition to 22 female supervisors, 13 managers, 3 department heads and one member of



the executive committee, all enjoying equal pay and equal benefits to their male counterparts."

At the Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino Women Rule: 52.27% of Team Members are female, and while they maintain their own identity they rise to all challenges, devoting resources and time to their family members, friends, and their communities, at home and at work.



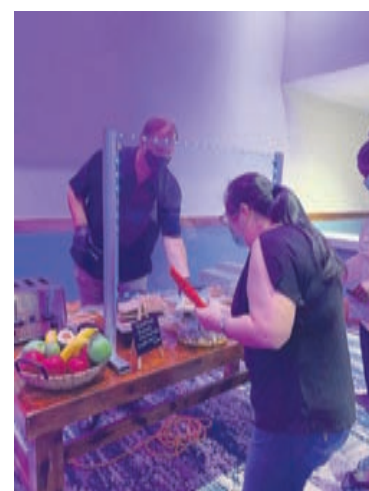
During Women's Day breakfast, General Manager Vasco Baselli reiterated the company's commitment to diversity and inclusion, meeting all challenging goals together, with women in key leadership roles, in a friendly, safe and supportive environment. The resort has continuously strived to provide its female Team Members with tools to deal with gender-related issues, especially violence against

women. "We are committed to creating an inclusive work environment, providing opportunities for women to thrive," said Baselli in his warm welcome words.

Hilton women continue to demonstrate unparalleled resiliency, leadership and empathy day after day, and it is always inspiring to

see how hospitality shines through, even at the most challenging of times.

Together the resort and the island have an incredibly promising future because of a shared commitment to an broad-minded culture. Here, we celebrate women not just this month, but every day of the year. □





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Covid-19: the status on Aruba

ORANJESTAD —Rules and protocols are being reviewed and evaluated on a daily basis and adapted as per current situation by a crisis team, in order to protect each and every one visiting and inhabiting our island.

There are currently (as per March 11th, closing of this edition) 221 active Covid cases on the island. 194 residents and 27 non-residents. There are 19 persons hospitalized of which 7 of them are in the Intensive care unit. A total of 111.433 persons have been tested of which 71.389 were tested at the airport. 77 persons lost the battle against Covid-19. A total of 28.872 persons registered for the vaccine of which 10.679 already received the first dosage of Pfizer vaccine.

Measurement by the Government of Aruba

- Curfew is from 12am to 5am.
- Closing time for businesses is 11pm.
- Max four (4) per table indoor and six (6) at a table outdoors.
- Only 1 musician is allowed to perform on stage.
- No musical events that are intended to attract customers.
- Background music is allowed/No dancing.
- Hotels and lodgings are exempted from the closing time, BUT only to serve their registered guests between 10pm and 6am.
- Casinos are not part of the exemption and

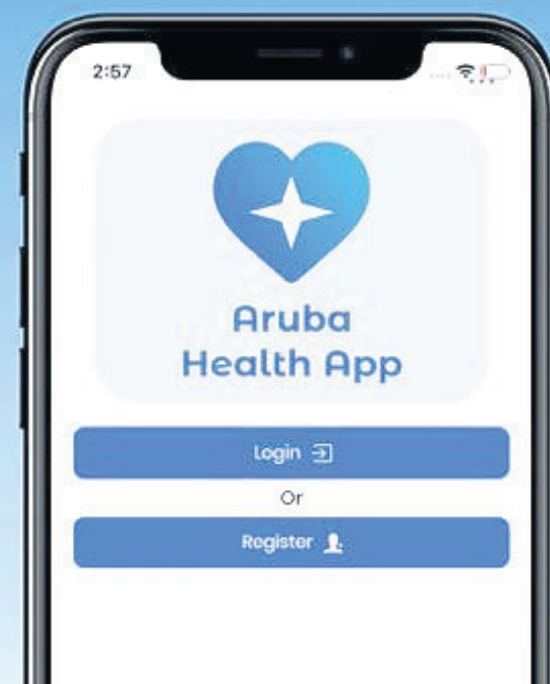
must close at 11pm.

Important notice:

- Prior to travel, visitors should download the Aruba Department of Public Health's Aruba Health App: A mobile resource for information on COVID-19 health procedures in Aruba, facilitation of the airport health screening, and faster results for Molecular PCR COVID-19 tests taken in Aruba.
- A flat premium fee of \$30 is applicable for new insurance policies for travelers over 14 years old.
- Effective January 26th, 2021, as announced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. government requires all international airline passengers to show proof of a negative, PCR or Antigen, Covid-19 test before boarding flights to the United States.

Testing facilities in Aruba:

- MedCare Clinic: www.medcare.aw - (+297) 280-0630 - Whatsapp (+297) 562-4440 - info@medcare.aw
- MedLab: www.covidaruba.com (+297) 586-1600 - Cell/Whatsapp (+297) 597-5544 - info@lab.aw
- Horacio Oduber Hospital <https://www.arubahospital.com/> - servicecenter@ho-haruba.com (+297) 597-4522 (Call or What-

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faster through the lines at the airport

sApp

More information on travel and health requirements can be found on www.aruba.com. □

Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation. Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for



supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received an extraordinary story from **Richard and Penny Doss**. They wrote:

"Tae and Teddy Thorton introduced us to Aruba last year and since then two trips later me and my wife were hooked for life.



Best vacation I have ever had in my entire life. Planned our second trip for October 2021 already. Tae and Teddy Thorton have a place at the Divi Beach and Golf Club. They've been coming to Aruba for quite some time now. They invited us up last year and I'm hooked for life. Aruba is definitely a place I would probably like to retire and live at for the rest of my life." □

Aqua Grill restaurant: The taste of New England with Caribbean flair



ORANJESTAD — One thing is for certain: Chef Scott Scheuerman and his team are famous for getting people hooked, just like the fish on your plate. You will get the taste of home fused with Caribbean while dining in elegance. Scheuerman will tell how Aqua Grill established its name since opening in 2002, and why it reaped accolades from such prestigious travel publications as Fodor's, who says, "This hip restaurant is heaven on earth for seafood lovers, who will find fresh fish galore..."

'A Scheuer thing'

American-born Scheuerman, executive chef of Aqua Grill, is thrilled about 'his restaurant'. "We started out as a New England style seafood restaurant, patterned after Boston style. But we quickly blended into some Caribbean, local flair... if you will. We do still offer the traditional New England dishes like whole Maine lobster, northern seafood plates like the salmon, tuna and swordfish. We buy also from the local fisherman to offer Caribbean dishes like snapper and grouper which are number one sellers in our restaurant being the most prevalent local fishes. Catches like wahoo, mahi mahi and brasil are

welcome too, anything that comes out of the water we embrace."

Fresh import from Boston

Aqua Grill flies in their own shipments on a weekly basis mostly from Boston because the price quality balance is the best, says the chef. "We are unique in this. Number one priority is buying fresh, we mean not frozen. Our original concept is New England seafood and we stick to that concept. They have a wonderful assortment of oysters and lobsters as well." Aqua Grill also offers international fusion type of menu items; actually all you wish for is there. A very balanced menu awaits you. "And we have options for meat lovers and vegetarians/vegans too. We, however, do not mix it up too much because we believe we do not want to lose our identity as a seafood restaurant," Scheuerman adds.

Rave reviews

Secretly, we all know that the success of a restaurant begins in the kitchen. That is where the chef creates his magic and for Aqua Grill the culinary team has won an assortment of awards for their continuous delivery of 'haute-cuisine del mar.' Classic seafood is mingled with contemporary ideas resulting in surprising dishes that soon made the restaurant a must-dine, con-



firmed by established travel media specialists like Fodor's and Frommer's.

The glow of Aqua Grill is obvious by entering the restaurant. The eclectic of a modern and a traditional New England fish house style appeal and the open-view kitchen adds to the thrill.

Let's see what is on the menu. Alaska King Crab Legs, Seared Chilean Sea Bass _a super seller, Steamed Live Maine Lobster or Broiled and Stuffed, Snapper and Grouper are part of the delicious seafood selections. All Covid-19 protocol is in place and you may choose to dine indoors or outdoors on the classy patio. Welcome to the theatre of the sea, let us entertain you.

A bit more about Scott

He knows what they like, the tourists from New England (and the rest of U.S. visitors) because he is one of them, yet he has been living for 18 years in the Caribbean making him an expert of both worlds. A native of Delaware, graduate of Johnson

& Wales culinary college in Rhode Island, Chef Scott had amassed over thirty years of regional cooking experience in hotels and restaurants as he chartered his course though New England, New Mexico, Florida and the Caribbean before making Aruba his home. Along with formal studies, his diversity as a chef is also due to his interest and university degree in Art and Cultural Anthropology, as well as his wife's native cooking. She is from Colombia.

It's clear as water; for sublime seafood in Aruba go to the island's premier seafood restaurant: Aqua Grill. This seafood-heaven place is already a statement for years with a consistency in upscale dining and top-shelf service. If you like to savor your seafood, this is your dive in. We promise you will get hooked.□

Aqua Grill

J.E. Irausquin Blvd. 374

Phone: +297-586-5900

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Uber, Lyft team up on database to expose abusive drivers

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE

AP Business Writer

SAN RAMON, Calif. (AP)

— Uber and Lyft have teamed up to create a database of drivers ousted from their ride-hailing services for complaints about sexual assault and other crimes that have raised passenger-safety concerns for years.

The clearinghouse unveiled Thursday will initially list drivers expelled by the ride-hailing rivals in the U.S. But it will also be open to other companies that deploy workers to perform services such as delivering groceries or take-out orders from restaurants.

The new safeguard, dubbed the “sharing safety program,” will be overseen by HireRight, a specialist in background checks. The use of a third party is aimed at addressing potential legal concerns about companies, including competitors such as Uber and Lyft, having access to information to each other’s personnel matters.

“Lyft and Uber are competitors in a whole lot of ways, but on this issue of safety, we completely agree that folks should be safe no matter what platform they choose,” Tony West, Uber’s



In this Feb. 9, 2021 file photo, a passer-by walks past a sign offering directions to an Uber and Lyft ride pickup location at Logan International Airport, in Boston.

chief legal officer, told The Associated Press. He spoke in an interview that also included Jennifer Brandenburger, Lyft’s head of policy development.

The safety program follows through on a promise that Uber made 15 months ago when it revealed that more than 3,000 sexual assaults had been reported on its service in the U.S. during 2018.

Since that revelation, San Francisco-based Uber and Lyft have been working to

navigate through antitrust and privacy concerns to create a way to flag drivers who have engaged in violent or other abhorrent behavior that culminated in them being booted off their services.

Sharing the information about reported sexual assaults is considered especially important because victims of such crimes frequently don’t file formal complaints with police. That gap has opened a crack for potentially dangerous

drivers to slip through routine background checks drawing upon legal records, Brandenburger said. To protect privacy, no passenger information will be shared in the database and the incidents that resulted in a driver’s dismissal will be listed in six broad categories: attempted non-consensual sexual penetration; non-consensual touching of a sexual body part; non-consensual kissing of a sexual body part; non-consensual kissing of a non-sexual

body part; non-consensual sexual penetration; and fatal physical assaults.

Only “fraction of a fraction” of drivers have engaged in behavior that fall into those categories, West said. Any company with access to the clearinghouse of information could still decide to allow a driver on its service after its own investigation, West said.

Michael Wolfe, a Uber driver who also leads a Washington state group representing about 2,000 other drivers, praised both ride-hailing services for trying to weed out the abuses in the industry.

“The few bad apples give all us drivers a bad name,” said Wolfe, executive director for Drive Forward.

The added layer of protection was hailed by the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, a victims’ rights group that has criticized the ride-hailing services for not doing more rigorous screening of their drivers. “Sexual violence thrives in secrecy,” said Scott Berkowitz, the network’s president. “Thanks to this initiative, perpetrators will no longer be able to hide or escape accountability by simply switching ridesharing platforms.” □

Associated Press

GM partner LG to invest \$4.5 billion in U.S. battery operation

The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — LG Energy Solution will invest more than \$4.5 billion in U.S. battery production by 2025 as

more automakers commit to churning electric vehicles sooner than anyone had expected.

The Korean company,

which has a joint venture with U.S. automaker General Motors, said the investment will help create 10,000 jobs, including subcontractors.

GM and LG are currently building a \$2.3 billion battery factory in Lordstown, Ohio, near Cleveland, that will employ about 1,000 people when it is completed in 2022. The site is fairly close to GM’s two other designated electric vehicle plants, one in Detroit and the other north of the city in Orion Township, Michigan. The companies hope to have a decision on a second site in the first half of the year.

General Motors has vowed to make its entire global

fleet largely electric by 2035, even changing its corporate logo to include the likeness of an electric plug. The 112-year-old Detroit automaker has promised to roll out 30 new battery-powered vehicles globally within five years.

That means GM is likely to need far more battery capacity.

The consulting firm LMC Automotive predicts that U.S. battery powered vehicle sales will exceed 1 million annually starting in 2023, and exceed 4 million by 2030.

Not only is the administration of President Joe Biden laying out plans to tackle climate change, it’s also prioritizing new supply

chains which it now considers a national security concern. That includes everything from computer chips to batteries, most of which are built in China and other countries.

“The goals of the U.S. president and automakers will be a propelling factor in the growth of the country’s electric vehicle and energy storage systems markets,” said Jong Hyun Kim, CEO of LG Energy Solution. “LG Energy Solution is dedicated to expanding its battery production capacity and structuring a stable, localized supply chain that provides everything from R&D to production.”

LG also makes batteries for Chevy’s electric Bolt. □



This Oct. 26, 2017 file photo shows the corporate logo of LG Electronics in Goyang, South Korea.

Associated Press

FireEye CEO: Reckless Microsoft hack unusual for China

By FRANK BAJAK and NATHAN ELLGREN

Associated Press

RESTON, Va. (AP) — Cyber sleuths have already blamed China for a hack that exposed tens of thousands of servers running Microsoft's Exchange email program to potential hacks. The CEO of a prominent cybersecurity firm says it now seems clear China also unleashed an indiscriminate, automated second wave of hacking that opened the way for ransomware and other cyberattacks. The second wave, which began Feb. 26, is highly uncharacteristic of Beijing's elite cyber spies and far exceeds the norms of espionage, said Kevin Mandia of FireEye. In its massive scale it diverges radically from the highly targeted nature of the original hack, which was detected in January.

"You never want to see a modern nation like China that has an offense capability — that they usually control with discipline — suddenly hit potentially a hundred thousand systems," Mandia said Tuesday in an interview with The Associated Press.

Mandia said his company assesses based on the forensics that two groups of Chinese state-backed hackers — in an explosion of automated seeding — installed backdoors known as "web shells" on an as-yet undetermined number of systems. Experts fear a large number could easily be exploited for second-stage infections of ransomware by criminals, who also use automation to identify and infect targets.

Across the globe, cybersecurity teams are scrambling to identify and shore up hacked systems. The National Governors Association sent a rare alert to governors on Tuesday asking them amplify "both the severity of the threat and the next steps" local governments, businesses and operators of critical infrastructure should take.

David Kennedy, CEO of the cybersecurity firm TrusteSec, tweeted Tuesday that resource-demanding



The CEO of FireEye Kevin Mandia gives a tour of the cybersecurity company's unused office space in Reston, Va., Tuesday, March 9, 2021.

Associated Press

programs that "mine" cryptocurrencies were being installed on some compromised Exchange servers.

The White House has called the overall hack an "active threat," but so far has not urged tough action against China or differentiated between the two waves — at least not publicly. Neither the White House nor the Department of Homeland Security offered comment on whether they attribute the second wave to China. The assessment of Mandia, who has been dealing with Chinese state-backed hackers since 1995 and has long had the ear of presidents and prime ministers, squares with that of Dmitri Alperovitch, former chief technical officer of CrowdStrike, the other cybersecurity powerhouse in the Washington, D.C., area. Alperovitch says China needs to be immediately put on notice: Shut down those web shell implants and limit collateral. The explosion of automated backdoor-creating hacks began five days before Microsoft issued a patch for the vulnerabilities first detected in late January by the cybersecurity firm Volexity. It had found evidence of the vulner-

abilities being used as far back as Jan. 3 by Chinese state-backed hackers, who researchers say targeted think tanks, universities, defense contractors, law firms and infectious-disease research centers.

Suddenly, all manner of organizations that run email servers were infected with web shells associated with known Chinese groups, who — knowing the patch was imminent — rushed to hit everything they could, said Mandia.

"They could sense it was going to end-of-life soon, so they just went wild. They machine gun-fired down the stretch," he said in an interview in FireEye's offices.

It's possible the second infection wave was not approved at the highest levels of China's government," Mandia said.

"This doesn't feel consistent with what they normally do," he said. "A lot of times there's a disconnect between senior leadership and front-line folks.

All I can tell you is it was surprising to me to see four 'zero days' wantonly exploited," adding, "If you could be exploited by this act, for the most part, you were."

"Zero days" are vulnerabilities that hackers discover and use to pry open secret doors in software. Their name derives from the countdown to patching that begins after they are deployed. In this case, it took Microsoft 28 days to produce a patch once it was notified.

Mandia cautioned that the mass hack is not apt to trigger any critical infrastructure failures or cost lives. "It's not going to draw blood." But it highlights how there are no rules of engagement in cyberspace, something governments urgently need to address "before something catastrophic happens."

Asked for comment on Monday about allegations it was behind the hack, the Chinese Embassy in Washington pointed to remarks last week from Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin saying that China "firmly opposes and combats cyber attacks and cyber theft in all forms." He said attribution of cyberattacks should be based on evidence and not "groundless accusations."

Mandia compared the Exchange hack with the SolarWinds hacking campaign that Washington has

blamed on elite Russian intelligence agents that his company discovered in December.

"The SolarWinds attack was very surreptitious, very stealthy, very focused. The operator showed restraint and they went deep not wide," said Mandia, who appeared in multiple Capitol Hill hearings on SolarWinds. "This attack (Exchange) feels very wide, but what I don't have an answer to yet is just how deep it is."

U.S. officials say at least nine federal agencies and over 100 private sector targets were affected by the SolarWinds campaign, named after the Texas company whose network management software was used to seed malware to more than 18,000 customers. Only a small number were hacked during the campaign, which went eight months without being detected.

Mandia said Russian intelligence operatives had manually penetrated the networks of between 60 and 100 different victims. Security researchers say telecommunications and software companies and think tanks were especially hard hit. □

With 'big one' coming, quake alert system launches in Oregon

By ANDREW SELSKY
Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — People in Oregon will be better prepared for earthquakes — particularly important in the Pacific Northwest because experts say "the big one" is coming — as an early warning system launched Thursday, the 10th anniversary of a devastating quake and tsunami in Japan.

California already has the system, while Washington state will join in May to complete coverage of the West Coast. The ShakeAlert system operated by the U.S. Geological Survey uses seismographic sensors to detect significant earthquakes quickly so alerts reach smartphones and people can seek cover before the shaking starts.

"It's very important that (the three states) are all partners in ShakeAlert, because earthquakes don't respect geographic boundaries, and we have huge population centers all across the West Coast where earthquake risk is the highest in the contiguous U.S.," said Gabriel Lotto, ShakeAlert user engagement facilitator for the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network.

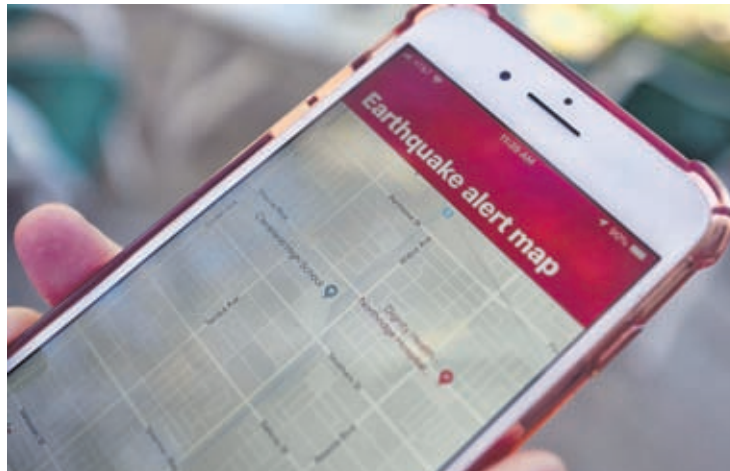
Earthquakes in the Cascadia subduction zone, which extends from the ocean off Northern California to Canada's Vancouver Island, have an average magnitude of around 9, making them among the world's biggest.

A quake in that zone has a 37% probability of happening off Oregon in the

next 50 years, with a slightly lower chance of one striking near Washington state, according to Chris Goldfinger, an Oregon State University professor and earthquake geologist.

"When a Cascadia event happens, the critical seconds of notice ShakeAlert warnings provide will save lives and reduce damage to important lifeline systems," Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said.

The system cannot predict an earthquake but can give people a jump on seeking cover from falling objects and time to brace themselves.



In this Jan. 3, 2019, file photo, a mobile phone customer looks at an earthquake warning application on an iPhone in Los Angeles. Associated Press

When an earthquake is detected, people who have alerts activated on their smartphones will get a message saying, "Earthquake detected! Drop, cover, hold on. Protect yourself." Mobile apps also carry the alerts.

Jenny Crayne of the Oregon Museum of Science

and Industry told reporters Wednesday that the system works by detecting an initial wave sent out by an earthquake. □

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

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3/12

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Casa del Mar 2BR/2B

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Week 5&6/1521 (20k/Wk.);
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Erivo on near-EGOT status: ‘I’m just going to keep working’

By MESFIN FEKADU
AP Music Writer
NEW YORK (AP) — “The Color Purple” turned into Grammy, Tony and Emmy gold for Cynthia Erivo. The performer’s brilliant performance in the Broadway revival won her the 2016 Tony for best actress in a musical. She performed songs from the play on the “Today” show, earning the Daytime Emmy for outstanding music performance in a daytime program. And the show’s soundtrack won best musical theater album at the 2017 Grammys.

“I guess I didn’t expect to be this close this soon,” Erivo told The Associated Press of her almost-EGOT status. “I’m just going to keep working. If it happens, it happens. It’s not the thing I’m chasing. I’m chasing good work, good projects and good stories. Hopefully that’s what ends up happening as a result of those things.”

Others have won a Tony, Grammy and Emmy in a single run like Erivo did, including Ben Platt and Rachel Bay Jones of “Dear



In this combination photo, actress Cynthia Erivo poses during a portrait session during the Toronto International Film Festival in Toronto on Sept. 10, 2019. Erivo portrays Aretha Franklin in the National Geographic miniseries “Genius: Aretha.”

Evan Hansen” fame and Katrina Lenk and Ari’el Stachel from “The Band’s Visit.” The Daytime Emmy the five stars received is now defunct and was last handed out in 2019.

“When I came to do the show on Broadway, I had no idea that it was even a thing,” Erivo said of winning multiple major awards from one show. “It was enough to be on Broadway. Let’s be honest — I was just this little girl who had done some stuff in London. I’d

done some West End. I’d done some theater. Didn’t know what Broadway was going to be like. It’s not something that’s a usual thing.

“The fact that I got to be on the stage with this show was like, ‘What is happening? Oh my God.’ Then this started happening: The Tony happened. Then the Grammy and the Emmy. I was just like, ‘This is so wild,’” she continued.

Erivo, 34, earned two Oscar nominations last year —

one for her performance as Harriet Tubman in “Harriet” and another for co-writing “Stand Up,” a song from the film’s soundtrack. That tune is now competing for a Grammy on Sunday.

Erivo said the nomination validates her songwriting prowess.

“(It’s) a tap on the shoulder for writing, which is what I want to be able to do,” said the singer, who is currently recording her debut album. “It’s like the seal of approval: ‘Well done. You

can do this.’”

Her song is nominated for best song written for visual media — a stacked category including nominees like Taylor Swift, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez, Billie Eilish and Brandy Carlile.

“It’s wild. Those people are brilliant writers,” Erivo exclaimed. “Andrew Lloyd Webber’s been writing since I don’t even know when. That’s crazy. The Lopez, as a theater kid, well, you know the deal there. They wrote ‘Frozen.’”

“I’ve listened to Billie Eilish’s music since she came out. She’s an incredible writer. The pen to paper is sublime,” she continued. “To be in and among those people is really awesome.”

Erivo’s other credits include the HBO series “The Outsider” and the film “Widows.” She will play Aretha Franklin in the National Geographic series, “Genius: Aretha,” which debuts March 21.

The British entertainer said she placed no limitations on her goals as a child and always dared to dream.

“I knew I wanted to sing. I knew that I wanted to act. I was looking at stars like Brandy and thinking, ‘Oh, I hope I can do that one day.’ Then you’re looking at Whitney Houston, you’re thinking, ‘Oh, I hope I can do that one day.’ I was a kid that was obsessed with Barbra Streisand. I would look at her shows and watch her films and be like, ‘My goodness, I hope I can do that one day.’”

“I don’t know that I knew that I would be here right now. I just knew that I would be singing and acting, somehow,” she continued. “That’s what I wanted, and well, I got my wish.” □

For Trevor Noah, Grammy Awards a return to in-person hosting



Trevor Noah arrives at the 62nd annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles on Jan. 26, 2020.

Associated Press

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr.
AP Entertainment Writer
LOS ANGELES (AP) — Trevor Noah took a careful approach hosting “The Daily Show” from his New York apartment during the pandemic, but he said traveling across the country to host the Grammys was an

opportunity he couldn’t pass up.

“If you get asked to host the Grammys, I don’t think you take long to say ‘yes,’” said the Emmy winner, who will host Sunday’s Grammy Awards from downtown Los Angeles. “All you figure out is the how.”

Initially, Noah wondered if the Grammys would be like most other major award shows that were held virtually during the pandemic. But he was assured that his first time hosting the ceremony honoring music’s best would be in person.

Noah said the ceremony, which airs at 8 p.m. Eastern on CBS and Paramount+, will have a “music festival vibe” with parts of the show held outdoors. He expects an entertaining show with several performers set to hit the stage including Taylor Swift, Billie Eilish, Cardi B and BTS.

“Unlike most award shows, the Grammys also are about the performances,” said Noah. Past hosts include Alicia Keys, James Corden and LL Cool J.

“So, at the Oscars, you can’t have like Denzel (Washington) perform his movie,” he continued. “But

the Grammys, you can have the artists perform their song. What’s made it unique is that we’ve managed to make a show that is a full show for you at home.

When you watch it, you won’t be spending the whole time like ‘Aww man, this is a pandemic show.’ Like no, this is one of your favorite concert shows.”

The Recording Academy said music artists in attendance will be socially distanced while playing “music for each other as a community and celebrate the music that unites us all.” The show was originally supposed to take place on Jan. 31, but the event was delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Beyoncé is the leading nominee with nine. Swift, Dua Lipa and Roddy Ricch each earned six nominations. □

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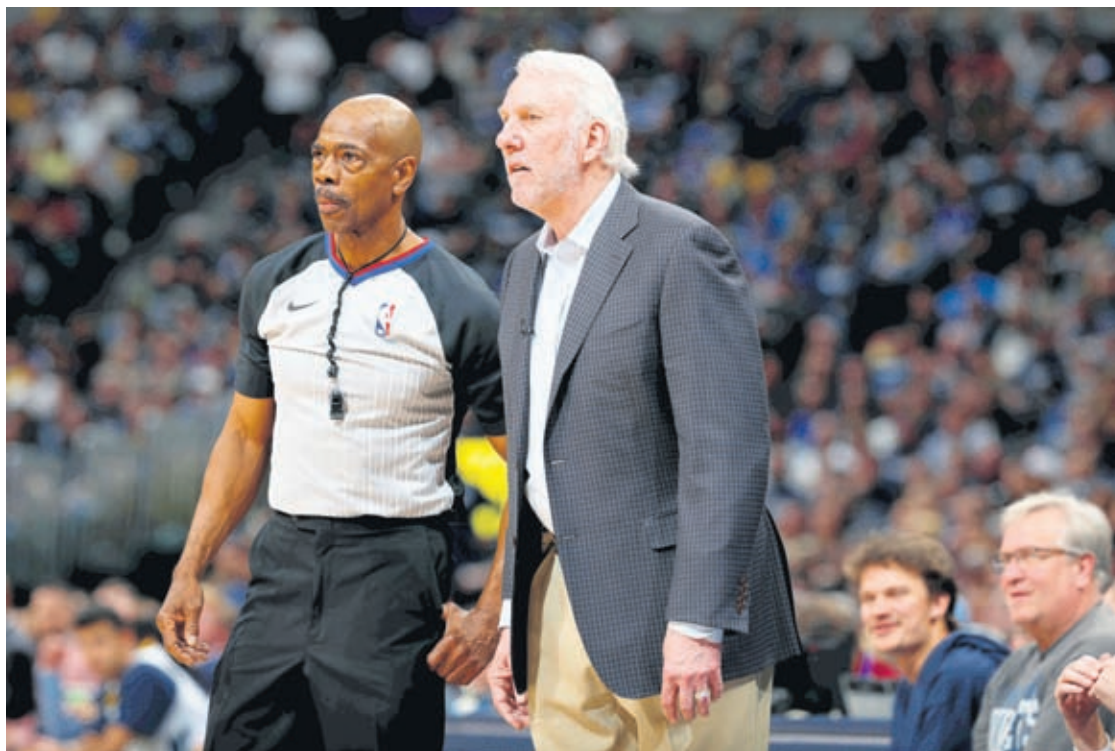
USA Basketball picks 57 players for men's Tokyo Games pool

By TIM REYNOLDS
AP Basketball Writer

USA Basketball is a step closer to choosing the team that will play in this summer's rescheduled Tokyo Olympics, releasing the names Thursday of 57 players who are part of the pool to fill the squad.

Among the group: 15 players who have already won Olympic gold medals for the U.S., including three-time gold winner LeBron James and two-time gold medalists Kevin Durant and Chris Paul.

The other past gold medalists under consideration for spots this summer are Harrison Barnes, Jimmy Butler, Anthony Davis, DeMar DeRozan, Paul George, Draymond Green, James Harden, Kyrie Irving, DeAndre Jordan, Kevin Love, Kyle Lowry and Russell Westbrook. It's also already drawing major interest from some NBA stars who have yet to taste Olympic gold. Kawhi Leonard said this week he intends to play if healthy this summer, and Stephen Curry has long said he would like the chance to compete in the Olympics. Curry has won a gold medal in a Basketball World Cup, but never been on the Olympic stage. There will be no tryouts. USA Basketball will pare the list to a 12-person Olympic team by early summer.



This April 13, 2019 file photo shows San Antonio Spurs head coach Gregg Popovich and referee Tom Washington (49) in the second half of Game 1 of an NBA first-round basketball playoff series in Denver.

These decisions will be made by a selection committee and based in part on player availability and health. Training camp will start with player arrivals in Las Vegas on July 2 while the NBA playoffs are ongoing, and the Olympics start July 23. That's just one day after the potential date of Game 7 of the NBA Finals. The U.S. is scheduled to play as many as five games in Las Vegas before leaving for Tokyo on July 19. The Americans, who are seeking a fourth consecutive gold medal, open the

Olympics against France on July 25.

James, if he chooses to play, could join Carmelo Anthony as the only men's players to make four U.S. Olympic teams. He has said in recent months he will consider the opportunity, noting the lure of playing for U.S. coach Gregg Popovich is a factor.

"With the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics from 2020 to 2021, it's important that we continue to remain flexible and consider all players who can contribute to our efforts to field the

best USA team possible," USA Basketball men's national team managing director Jerry Colangelo said. "These additions we are announcing today will help ensure that we are doing that."

Those additions, who were not part of the pool created in early 2020 in anticipation of an Olympics happening last summer, are: New Orleans' Zion Williamson, Miami's Duncan Robinson, Cleveland's Jarrett Allen, Detroit's Jerami Grant, Brooklyn's Blake Griffin, Milwaukee's Jrue

Holiday, Chicago's Zach LaVine, New York's Julius Randle and Mitchell Robinson, Toronto's Fred VanVleet, Atlanta's Trae Young and the Houston trio of Eric Gordon, John Wall and Christian Wood.

Jordan, who now plays for Brooklyn, is also a newcomer to the pool even though he was on the 2016 Olympic team.

All 44 players that were announced as part of the original pool last year remain, with two exceptions: Golden State's Klay Thompson is recovering from Achilles surgery, and Boston's Marcus Smart, who has battled injuries as well throughout much of this season.

The players back from last year's pool are: Bam Adebayo, LaMarcus Aldridge, Barnes, Bradley Beal, Devin Booker, Malcolm Brogdon, Jaylen Brown, Butler, Mike Conley, Curry, Davis, DeRozan, Andre Drummond, Durant, George, Green, Harden, Montrezl Harrell, Joe Harris, Tobias Harris, Gordon Hayward, Dwight Howard, Brandon Ingram, Irving, James, Kyle Kuzma, Leonard, Damian Lillard, Brook Lopez, Love, Lowry, JaVale McGee, Khristian Middleton, Donovan Mitchell, Victor Oladipo, Paul, Mason Plumlee, Jayson Tatum, Myles Turner, Kemba Walker, Westbrook and Derrick White. □

Associated Press

Popovich announces Aldridge will be moving on from Spurs

DALLAS (AP) — LaMarcus Aldridge has played his final game for the San Antonio Spurs, with coach Gregg Popovich announcing Wednesday night that the team and the seven-time All-Star have mutually agreed to seek opportunities for him elsewhere.

The Spurs will try to trade Aldridge before the March 25 deadline. If no trades are worked out, the team could simply buy Aldridge out and let him sign elsewhere as a free agent. "LaMarcus is not with the team," Popovich said before the Spurs played

the Dallas Mavericks. "He's healthy, in that respect, but we've mutually agreed to work out some opportunities for him and that'll be elsewhere. So, he won't be with the team moving forward."

The 35-year-old Aldridge was in his sixth season with the Spurs after playing his first nine NBA seasons with the Portland Trail Blazers. The No. 2 overall pick in the 2006 draft played in 21 games this season, averaging 13.7 points and 4.5 rebounds in 25.9 minutes — a career low in rebounds and his fewest points and minutes since

he was a rookie.

Popovich insisted that the decision to part ways was best for both sides, and spoke highly of Aldridge. "There was no problem there. We just think this is a win-win for both LaMarcus and for the club," Popovich said.

"So, when an opportunity arises, that'll be up to management, his agent, you know, that sort of thing. We'll all move forward."

In Aldridge's last three appearances before the All-Star break, Popovich moved him to the bench. Prior to that, he missed six games over three weeks



New Orleans Pelicans guard Eric Bledsoe (5) is blocked by San Antonio Spurs center LaMarcus Aldridge (12) as he tries to score during the first half of an NBA basketball game in San Antonio, Saturday, Feb. 27, 2021.

Associated Press

with a hip injury and then before the break with a stomach ailment. □

Recent history of free agency shows it's a cautionary tale

By **JOSH DUBOW**
AP Pro Football Writer

Dak Prescott got his big contract worthy of a franchise quarterback, while big-play receivers Chris Godwin and Allen Robinson got slapped with franchise tags.

Before the new league year and annual spending spree started, many of the top players at the premium positions were once again kept off the open market.

It's a predictable pattern in the NFL where the franchise tag, or even the threat of it, helps keep most of the best quarterbacks, pass catchers, pass rushers and tackles from ever hitting true free agency.

Teams shopping for help each March usually must settle for spending big money on second-tier players at premium spots or target lower-profile spots like the interior offensive line.

"You never want to go crazy in free agency," Broncos first-year general manager George Paton said. "You don't want to build your team in free agency. You want to fill selective needs going into the draft. That has been my philosophy. You don't always want to be the first one out of the gate and throw all your money, but there is something you need, you'll take a shot. I just think you have to be selective and you have to look at every situation. If you can fill a need and help your team, you're



In this Oct. 11, 2020, file photo, Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott throws a pass in the first half of an NFL football game against the New York Giants in Arlington, Texas.

going to go for it."

Some needs are typically more available than others when it comes to free agency. NFL franchises have handed out 85 contracts the past three off-seasons to free agents who switched teams, led by 14 interior offensive linemen.

Because there is only one franchise tag for the O-line, teams are more apt to let guards and centers hit the open market instead of paying them tackle prices. In all, more than half (46 out of 85) of the big-money deals went to offensive

linemen and front-seven defensive players. Seven tackles, seven interior defenders, nine edge rushers and nine linebackers also got the hefty contracts, with six of the edge rushers cashing in last off-season.

That class fell far short of delivering, with Robert Quinn, Dante Fowler, Mario Addison, Jordan Phillips, Shaq Lawson and Carl Nassib going from an average of 9.1 sacks the year before hitting the open market to just 3.1 last season in the first year of their new deals.

The results for receivers

to change teams in free agency haven't been much better.

Only two of the 11 players who got contracts worth at least \$25 million even posted a 1,000-yard season with their new team. Robinson did it the last two years of his three-year deal with Chicago and got the franchise tag this off-season. John Brown did it for Buffalo in 2019 — and he was released this week.

The few tight ends and running backs to get paid in free agency haven't fared much better.

Associated Press

Four of the five players were let go before the end of their deals. Only Austin Hooper remains after signing a \$42 million, four-year deal in Cleveland last off-season.

Only six quarterbacks got at least \$25 million to change teams, with the group including aging veterans Tom Brady and Philip Rivers last off-season; journeymen like Teddy Bridgewater, Nick Foles and Case Keenum; and one starter in his prime, Kirk Cousins, who joined Minnesota in 2018 after signing franchise tags his final two seasons in Washington.

Teams have handed out 17 big contracts in the secondary the past three off-seasons, with only Tyrann Mathieu, Richard Sherman, James Bradberry and Byron Jones offering a strong return on investment.

Spending in free agency is a cautionary tale. Of the 25 players given contracts to change teams worth at least \$25 million in the 2018 off-season, 12 were let go before the end of those megadeals they signed. Sammy Watkins and Richard Sherman headed to free agency after completing their three-year deals.

The 2019 class isn't faring much better with nine of the 29 players given contracts of at least \$25 million to change teams already being cut before beginning their third season of the deals.

Alaphilippe wins Stage 2 of Tirreno, Van Aert stays in lead



Cyclists pedal during the second stage of the Tirreno Adriatico cycling race, from Camaiore to Chiusdino, Italy, Thursday, March 11, 2021.

Associated Press

CHIUSDINO, Italy (AP) — Julian Alaphilippe sprinted to victory on the uphill finish of the second stage of the weeklong Tirreno-Adriatico race on Thursday, and Belgian rider Wout van Aert remained in the overall lead. Alaphilippe, a French cyclist for Deceuninck-Quick-Step, caught a fading João Almeida in sight of the line and had time to raise his arms above his head as he crossed just ahead of Mathieu Van Der Poel and Van Aert in a bunch sprint.

"Everyone was on the limit and so when I saw João I went full gas," Alaphilippe said. "This victory makes me very happy."

"It's not easy to win wearing the rainbow jersey (of the world champion) and so it's a special feeling. The team believed in me today and we did a great job." Almeida had looked set to win after attacking with just over a kilometer remaining of the undulating 202-kilometer (126-mile) leg from Camaiore to Chiusdino. He finished

seventh. Van Aert has a four-second lead over Alaphilippe. Van Der Poel is third in the standings, eight seconds behind.

Unlike the pure sprinters, Van Aert can also hold his own in climbing stages and is aiming for overall victory. He won the Strade Bianche and Milan-San Remo classic last year and posted three stage victories in the Tour de France over the past two years. He's also a three-time world champion in cyclocross. □